

SOCIALISM
and
RELIGION
an essay

Archibald Robertson

THREE SHILLINGS *and* SIXPENCE

SOCIALISM and RELIGION

An Essay

by

Archibald Robertson

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I

Introduction

Gustave Tridon, the French nineteenth-century Socialist and historian, member of the First International and supporter of the Paris Commune, defined Socialism as in economics Communism, in politics Republicanism and in religion Atheism. This definition is in accord with the Blanquist school of socialism to which Tridon belonged. It also accords with Marx's description of religion as "the opium of the people", "the illusory happiness" made necessary by their unhappy condition.¹ But Marx and Engels expressly repudiated the Blanquist demand that religious organisations should be suppressed. "The only service," wrote Engels, "that can be rendered to God today is to declare atheism a compulsory article of faith."² And Marx: "Everyone should be able to attend to his religious as well as his bodily needs without the police sticking their noses in."³

This attitude—a critical detachment from religion, combined with a belief in liberty of conscience—was general among the pioneers of the Second International. Bebel in Germany, Jaurès in France, Morris, Hyndman and Belfort Bax in Britain (however imperfect Marxists some of them were) were personally atheists and expected other Socialists to

¹ *Marx and Engels on Religion*, p. 42.

² *Ibid.*, p. 142.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

be atheists, without going so far as to commit the Socialist movement to an atheist crusade. "Religion is a private matter," it was said among the German Social Democrats, "but atheism is a Party matter."

As time went on it became evident that this detachment from religion was not enough. A Socialist Party aims at becoming a mass party, or it may as well shut up shop. Whether we like it or not, the fact remains that many workers are religious. That their religion may be an opium necessitated by their unhappy condition does not alter the fact. The extent to which this is the case naturally varies in different countries. In France, which has a popular anti-clerical tradition dating from the Revolution, the problem is less acute than in English-speaking countries, where popular movements for centuries past have been closely interwoven with religion.

It is not a promising approach to say to such people: "We are not going to interfere with your freedom of conscience; go to church if you must; but our candid opinion is that you are miserable opium-addicts. When you have helped us to build Socialism, you will, we hope, drop the lamentable habit." They want more than mere toleration, they want respect, and if they do not get it from Socialists, they will vote against them.

Faced with this difficulty, Social Democratic politicians dropped the subject of religion altogether, or, worse still, paid religion a degree of lip-service which amounted to a repudiation of Marxism. This unfortunately is only part of that general tendency to compromise with capitalism for petty gains which—initiated by the British Fabians and copied by German and other "revisionists"—rotted away the Second International, led to the betrayal of 1914 and infects today every Social Democratic party of the capitalist West. Communist parties came into existence to remedy that rot and that betrayal. They have to bring to bear on religion the same scientific methods which they bring to bear on imperialism, war and other manifestations of class society.

But in doing so Communists must avoid a sectarian

approach. They must apply Marxism not dogmatically, as if a formula framed for one situation automatically fitted other situations always and everywhere, but dialectically—studying the history of religion and the causes which lead to the prevalence of given religions under given conditions, which under changed conditions lead to the replacement of one religion by another, and which will eventually lead to the replacement of all religions by a scientific and materialist outlook on the world. Such an approach means more than toleration of religious fellow-workers. It means respect for their beliefs as a natural outcome of their past history, and avoidance of such affronts as would needlessly antagonise them in the struggle for Socialism.

II

Ruling Class Religion and Mass Religion

1. *Social Origins of Religion*

It is a primary postulate of Marxism that the whole of human life, social, political and intellectual, rests on a material basis. Ever since man was man, he has been a social animal depending for survival on some form of co-operative struggle with the world about him. His ideas reflect that struggle; and the particular form which they take depends on the changing conditions under which he struggles. But his ideas also help to change those conditions. As Marx says, "in practice man must prove the truth, i.e. the reality and power, the 'this-sidedness' of his thinking".¹

In primitive societies man's productive equipment is rudimentary and his thinking equally so. In such societies there is no ruling class, since there is no surplus of food on which a ruling class could live. All are equally engaged in the struggle with nature and equally handicapped by wrong methods and wrong notions. In the words of Engels, "the low economic development of the prehistoric period is supplemented and also partially conditioned and even caused by the false conceptions of nature"—belief in spirits, magic forces and the

¹ Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach*.

like.¹ By rites connected with such beliefs primitive man tries to eke out his very limited control of the environment with which he has to struggle to live.

Recognition of this fact of history is not peculiar to Marxists. Abundant examples of such primitive beliefs and practices may be found in Frazer's *Golden Bough*, Malinowski's *Magic, Science and Religion*, and (mainly in connection with Greek religion) Jane Harrison's *Themis*. Backward societies use various words to denote a power which they do not understand, but which they try to control by appropriate rites. The Iroquois call such power *orenda*, and, if a man is thought to have died from witchcraft, say: "An evil *orenda* has struck him." The Melanesians call it *mana*. These words are the equivalent in backward societies of what more sophisticated people call "spirit". Like it, they are labels tied to the unknown.

In such primitive societies as those of the Australian aborigines magic is the only religion. Even after the domestication of animals and the cultivation of plants for food "a religious act" and "a means of working magic" are "almost the same thing".²

But with the growth of productive equipment from a primitive to a somewhat higher level class society begins. The head of a clan or tribe, credited with more *mana* than his fellows, becomes a whole-time magician living on surplus food contributed by them. As Frazer puts it, "magicians or medicine-men appear to constitute the oldest artificial or professional class in the evolution of society".³ Or as Malinowski puts it, "round every big magician there arises a halo made up of stories about his wonderful cures or kills, his catches, his victories, his conquests in love".⁴ From the magician wielding his supposed *mana* for the good of his clan or tribe arise in later society the different conceptions of the priest, the king and the god.

¹ *Marx-Engels Correspondence*, Engels to Schmidt, 27 October, 1890.

² Engels, *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, I.

³ Frazer, *Golden Bough*, abridged edition, VII.

⁴ Malinowski, *Magic, Science and Religion*, V, 4.

At first the three are not sharply distinguished. But as productive technique becomes more complicated—hunting, for example, giving place to agriculture—and the failures of the magician become more frequent and less easy to explain away, a distinction has to be made between the god, the mighty source of the food supply and continuing life of the community, and his fallible human interpreter. When all goes well, the god is pleased. When all goes ill, the god is angry, and somebody is for it. The unlucky magician is killed—or still better, a magician is killed as soon as he shows any sign of infirmity and without waiting for actual ill-luck, so that his power passes unimpaired into the earth. But a full-blown priest-king is usually rich enough to arrange for a slave or somebody else of no account to be sacrificed instead. Magic has evolved into something recognisable as religion.

Later still a natural division of labour differentiates the priest, the specialist in religious rites and interpreter of the will of the god, from the king, the leader of the community in war. Yet the distinction between priest, king and god masks an underlying identity. As George Thomson says, "the idea of godhead springs from the reality of kingship; but in the human consciousness, split as it now is by the cleavage in society, this relation is inverted. The king's power appears to be derived from God, and his authority is accepted as being the will of God".¹ In the *Iliad* king Sarpedon urges his kinsman Glaucus to the fight, saying: "Why have the people of Lycia conferred on us the highest honours—pride of place and precedence in food and drink? They regard us as gods, and they have bestowed on us an estate of rich ploughland. Therefore we must be foremost in the fray."² Even in modern states—though in fewer than formerly—part of the officially prescribed "opium of the people" consists in the elevation of the titular head of the State into a quasi-divinity whose slightest sayings and doings are recorded by press and radio as if they had a supernatural quality. Coronation is a relic of ancient

¹ Thomson, *Aeschylus and Athens*, I.

² Homer, *Iliad* XII, 310 ff.

deification—the magic investment of a new ruler with the supernatural powers necessary to assure the continued life of the community. But there is now no corresponding obligation to be “foremost in the fray” or in anything else except, perhaps, the patronage of sport.

2. Judaism, Christianity and Islam

As the contradictions in class society widen—as slavery grows; as the gulf grows between rulers, rich in slaves and other wealth, and their subjects; as administrative needs lead to the invention of writing and the rise of a class of scribes separate from the illiterate majority; as cities coalesce into empires and their gods into ordered pantheons; and last but not least, as magical beliefs among the lettered class begin to weaken with the dawn of scientific discovery—the cleavage between rulers and masses is reflected in religion. Official religion, in which the ruling class now only half believes, is kept up as a source of income and an instrument of government. Popular religion, centring as it always did round the preservation and renewal of life, tends—as actual life becomes less and less pleasant—to become associated with hopes of future deliverance, and as deliverance in this life becomes less and less likely, with dreams of another life which wishful thinking locates beyond the grave. The annual resurrection of the corn-god (Osiris in Egypt, Attis in Asia Minor, or whoever he may be) is felt to be a sort of pledge that men too may by appropriate ritual be redeemed from death and “reborn to eternal life”. So in Egypt, in Persia, in Greece, in one ancient civilisation after another, arose the various “mystery religions”, all holding out to their initiates the hope of a happy immortality in compensation for present misery.

The same cleavage between official and popular religion helps to explain a phenomenon which pre-Marxist historians can only record as an inexplicable fact—the appearance in the ancient Mediterranean world of the Jewish people, who

(to quote Gibbon) "excited the curiosity and wonder of other nations" by "the sullen obstinacy with which they maintained their peculiar rites and unsocial manners": and the later transmission of their "exclusive zeal" to the early Christians.¹

Palestine, the country of origin of Judaism and Christianity, was a meeting-place between the tribal society of the desert and the civilisations of Egypt and Babylonia, and the scene of constant clashes between the rival empires seated in those two countries. The people of Palestine thus had long first-hand experience of the contrast between tribal society and class society.

Israel was originally a collection of desert tribes who in the fourteenth century B.C., during the decline of Egyptian power, invaded and settled in Palestine, as other desert tribes had done before, and as others did later. The story of their migrations in the early books of the Old Testament was compiled many hundreds of years after the settlement and is no more historical than the Homeric story of the Trojan War. Archaeology has confirmed the fact of the destruction of Jericho, as it has confirmed the fact of the destruction of Troy; but Joshua and the trumpets are as mythical as Agamemnon and the wooden horse.

Once settled in Palestine, Israel passed through the usual evolution from tribal society to class society, but with important differences. First, the tribal society of the desert was near at hand to remind the exploited people of the freedom they had lost. Secondly, there was no state in Palestine strong enough to repress such mass movements as occurred, until the conquest by Assyria in the eighth century B.C.. Thirdly, even after that the rivalry of the great empires—Assyria, Egypt, Babylon, Persia, and the successors of Alexander the Great—meant that none held Palestine securely and few held it long, until in the last century B.C. Rome conquered the East. Hence the disinherited classes hoped longer than elsewhere for earthly deliverance. Their hopes were voiced by the

¹ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, XV.

prophets, whose writings are the oldest revolutionary literature we possess. This literature—written in rhythmical verse so as to be readily memorised, passed from hand to hand, interpolated as occasion arose, and ranging in date from the eighth to the second century B.C.—inveighs against kings, priests, usurers and other enemies of the people, and looks back to the legendary days “in the wilderness” as an age when such oppressors were unknown. In the eighth century the peasant-poet Amos thus attacks the priesthood:

I hate, I despise your feasts,
And I will take no delight in your solemn assemblies.
Yea, though ye offer me your burnt offerings and meal offerings,
I will not accept them:
Neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts.
Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs;
For I will not hear the melody of thy viols.
But let judgment roll down as waters,
And righteousness as a mighty stream.¹

The class struggle resulted in a compromise between the priests and the prophets, embodied in a law-book compiled about 400 B.C. and fictitiously attributed to Moses—the Pentateuch or first five books of the Bible. No gods are to be worshipped but one—Jahveh, the god of the nomad ancestors of Israel. There is to be only one temple—that at Jerusalem. All are to have a weekly day of rest—even slaves. Human sacrifice and other barbaric rites are forbidden. Slavery is allowed; but runaway slaves are to be freed, and every seven years all debts between Jews are to be cancelled and all Jewish slaves offered their freedom and a chance to start as independent producers. No such radical programme had ever been enacted before. How much of it was ever executed is an interesting question.

Monotheism is not a mere matter of metaphysics. A god is not merely a hypothetical being who rains and thunders and gives or withholds your food supply, but the centre of an

¹ Amos v, 21-4.

organised cult with a priesthood who live on offerings. When people get to the point of resenting priestly extortions and seeing through obvious priestly impostures, but have not yet got to the point of denying gods altogether, the question whether they shall support many priesthoods or only one becomes of practical importance. When we read the invectives of the prophets against idolatry, we find it closely bound up not with the abstract question whether the principle of the universe is many or one, but with concrete issues between the "haves" and "have-nots". Gods are costly beings; their reduction to one was an economy in temples and priests, and progressive for that time.

In the struggle between empires Palestine fell successively to Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece and finally Rome. To the Greek and Roman conquerors the Jews seemed an odd brand of fanatics with their insistence on one God only and their peculiar code of law. To the Jewish people the conquerors seemed devouring beasts, each worse than the last. And they did not keep their opinion to themselves. During the last three centuries B.C. colonies of Jews, scattered in the cities of the Mediterranean and speaking Greek as their adopted tongue, propagated their ideas and made thousands of proselytes. There were repeated attempts to repress Jewish propaganda—the attempt of Antiochus IV in the second century B.C. to suppress Judaism altogether; the expulsion of the Jews from Rome by the emperors Tiberius and Claudius; the crushing of the Jewish revolt by Titus and the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70; finally, the crushing of the last Jewish revolt by Hadrian and the expulsion of the Jews from Judaea in A.D. 135.

In the literature of the Jewish revolutionary struggle which has come down to us a prominent feature is the idea of a Messiah—an "anointed king" and heaven-sent leader who will break the yoke of the oppressor and usher in a golden age of peace and justice. The idea of the Messiah varies very much: sometimes he is a "son of David", a prince of the old royal line of Judah; sometimes he is a living leader; sometimes he is

a supernatural being chosen by God before the beginning of days. As time goes on and the struggle of the Jewish people becomes more desperate, the character of the Messiah and the circumstances in which he is to appear become more visionary and supernatural. But any Jewish revolutionary leader might aspire to the rôle, and we know that many did. Among Greek-speaking Jews the word for the Messiah was *Christos*=Christ.

The name "Christian", therefore, to inhabitants of the Roman Empire originally meant the follower of a Christ or Messiah. As such it had a revolutionary significance. That is what we are to understand when we read in Suetonius that Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome because they "constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus", and that Nero inflicted punishment on "the Christians, a class of men given to a new and mischievous superstition".¹ When we read in Tacitus that these Christians derived their name from a Christ who was executed by the procurator of Judaea, Pontius Pilate, there is nothing incredible about it. That sort of thing would happen.

But in travelling through the Mediterranean cities Jewish ideas suffered a good deal of modification. Not all Jews were hostile to the Roman Empire. Some were doing well in business and had no interest in revolutionary movements. They might dislike much of what they saw in the Empire—its primitive religious rites, its gladiatorial shows and so on. But a head-on clash with the Empire was the last thing they wanted, and a Messianic propaganda leading to such a clash filled them with alarm.

Consequently we find from the first century of our era onward an organised attempt to give the Messianic idea an other-worldly interpretation on the analogy of the mystery religions already widespread in the Mediterranean. In the books of the New Testament, as we have them, we see an originally revolutionary propaganda deliberately countered—not to say smothered—by another which contradicts it. On

¹ Suetonius, *Claudius*, XXV, 4; *Nero*, XVI, 2.

the one hand we have slogans like, "The kingdom of God is at hand"—that kingdom which, Jewish patriots hoped, would "break in pieces and consume" all the beast-empires of the earth and stand for ever:¹

He has put down princes from thrones,
And has exalted them of low degree.
The hungry he has filled with good things;
And the rich he has sent empty away.²

On the other hand we have "my kingdom is not of this world",³ "our wrestling is not against flesh and blood",⁴ and—in the direct tradition of the mystery religions—

That which you yourself sow is not quickened,
Except it die . . .
So also is the resurrection of the dead . . .
Now this I say, brothers,
That flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.⁵

It is significant that the chief apostle of this spiritual gospel is said to have been a prosperous master-craftsman, a tent-maker, perhaps doing jobs for the Roman army—Paul of Tarsus.⁶

Early Christianity owed what mass appeal it had to its promise of a speedy overthrow of the Roman Empire (the "beast" with "seven heads", the "great harlot arrayed in purple and scarlet"⁷) and of "a new heaven and a new earth" in which the redeemed would "reign for ever and ever".⁸ But it owed its funds and its organisation to men who sought not the overthrow of the Empire, but an alliance with it, and who

¹ Daniel ii, 44. Cf. Mark i, 15.

² Luke i, 52-3.

³ John xviii, 36.

⁴ Ephesians vi, 12.

⁵ 1 Corinthians xv, 36 ff.

⁶ Prosperous—since he could travel about the Mediterranean at his own cost. Roman citizenship suggests a man of substance.

⁷ Revelation xvii, 1 ff.

⁸ Ibid., xxi-xxii.

either rejected these revolutionary prophecies or interpreted them in a strictly spiritual sense. By the Church leaders, in Gibbon's words, "the doctrine of Christ's reign upon earth was at first treated as a profound allegory, was considered by degrees as a doubtful and useless opinion, and was at length rejected as the absurd invention of heresy and fanaticism".¹ The Apocalypse scraped into the canon only by the skin of its teeth.

The rulers of the Empire hesitated how to treat such a movement. If it was revolutionary, to the lions with it! If not, a deal might be possible. Finally in the fourth century Constantine did a deal, and the Church became an instrument or government and a partner in the new feudalism that was arising on the ruins of ancient slave civilisation. The Donatists in North Africa, who repudiated the compromise between Church and Empire, who rallied peasants, runaway slaves and insolvent debtors to their standard, and who "pretended to restore the primitive equality of mankind", were hunted down like "the wild beasts of the desert", and dying "by the sword, the axe or the fire", were the first Christians to be martyred by their fellow-Christians.²

The Church never won the unanimous allegiance of the Mediterranean peoples. The Creed adopted in 325 at the Council of Nicaea, with its contradictory dogmas about "Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of his Father before all worlds . . . being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made: who for us men, and for our salvation came down from heaven . . . and was made man, and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate", was a politically dictated attempt to reconcile irreconcilable elements in Christianity—the mystery-god dying and rising that his people might have eternal life, and the tradition of a Jewish Messiah crucified by a Roman procurator. Large masses of the population—significantly enough, mainly in those Middle Eastern countries where Christianity had first

¹ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, XV.

² *Ibid.*, XXI.

arisen and where its original Jewish form was most likely to be remembered—refused to swallow this bundle of contradictions by imperial order.

And in the seventh century, when a new Arab invasion burst on the enfeebled Empire proclaiming the old Judaeo-Christian doctrine of the unity of God and the equality of all believers, the peoples of the Middle East welcomed the invaders as deliverers and went over *en masse* to Islam. In North Africa, the home of the Donatists, imperial and ecclesiastical extortions “provoked the sectaries, and even the Catholics, of the Roman province to abjure the religion as well as the authority of their tyrants”.¹ Just as Judaism had arisen as a mass movement against priestly exploiters, just as Christianity had arisen as a mass movement against imperial Rome, so Islam spread as a mass movement against a Church which had betrayed the masses, and whose Mariolatry and saint-worship were thin disguises for the paganism it pretended to supersede.

Needless to say, after Islam had conquered an empire, it became in its turn a ruling class religion—the instrument of domination of caliphs, sultans, shahs, emirs, pashas, beys and effendis, and of the feudal rulers of the Middle East today.

3. *The Middle Ages*

During the Middle Ages the established social order in western Europe was feudalism based on serfdom, and the greatest feudal landowner was the Catholic Church. The Church justified its privileges by a theology according to which Christ had given to the Pope (assumed on flimsy evidence to be the successor of Peter) the keys of the kingdom of heaven and the power to remit sins. This power is delegated by the Pope to all Catholic bishops, and by the bishops to the humblest priest ordained by the laying on of their hands.

¹ *Ibid.*, LI.

Further, according to Catholic dogma, every ordained priest has the miraculous power of changing bread and wine into the actual body and blood of Christ, which in the mass he offers as a sacrifice for the sins of the living and the dead.

This dogma of transubstantiation—the magic power of the priest in the mass to “make his Maker”—is of more than theological importance. On such magic powers hangs the whole prestige of the priestly office. Much of the vast wealth of the Catholic Church is derived from the donations and bequests of generations of the faithful who believed that masses would be effective in ameliorating their lot after death. According to a famous twelfth-century theologian, Peter Lombard, ‘if two men, one poor and the other rich, die the same day, the one having no other succour than the ordinary prayers of the Church, while for the other many masses can be said and many works of charity can be done, the rich man’s deliverance from purgatory will not be more perfect, but it will be earlier’.¹ If there is nothing miraculous about the mass, the Church’s wealth has been obtained on false pretences. In fighting for transubstantiation the Church fights for no mere metaphysical definition, but for the income and social status of her hierarchy.

Throughout the Middle Ages there were opposition movements of one kind or another to these pretensions of the Church. We have seen how the attempt to enforce a uniform creed led to the loss of the whole Middle East to Islam. In the West the peasantry, whose conversion to Christianity was often forced and far from thorough, kept up old pagan rites in the form of the witch-cult. But this was a hole-and-corner business and a reactionary, not a progressive, movement. There was no dangerous opposition to the Western Church until the revival of trade led to the rise of the bourgeoisie (burghers—people of the burghs or towns).

From the thirteenth century, when heretical movements in the towns began to be dangerous, the Church met them by savage repression. That century saw the crusade against the

¹ D'Aubigné, *History of the Great Reformation*.

Cathari or Albigenses in southern France and the foundation of the Inquisition. The fourteenth century saw the rise of the Lollards in England, the Peasant Revolt of 1381 (when the Archbishop of Canterbury was beheaded by rebels who told him they cared nothing for the Pope or his interdicts) and a spread of disbelief in priestly and monkish impostures which finds vent even in the courtly Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. The fifteenth century saw the repression of the Lollards by stake and faggot in England and Scotland, and the more successful Hussite rising in Bohemia—a patriotic war against papal and German domination which the Czech people remember to this day with pride.

By now the bourgeoisie were becoming richer through the expansion of production and the use of new inventions. They were also becoming better educated through the multiplication of schools and universities, the revival of the classics and the invention of the printing press. At the end of the fifteenth century the discovery of America and of the Cape route to India and the Far East opened up new sources of wealth. At the same time feudal power in England, France and Spain became concentrated in the hands of national monarchs who, while they used the Church as an instrument of government, were determined to control it and not to be controlled by it. These contradictions in feudalism cleared the way for the bourgeoisie and heralded the birth of the modern world.

4. *The Reformation*

The Reformation of the sixteenth century was precipitated by the attempt of the Pope to raise money by the sale of indulgences (documents purporting to remit sin) in Germany; but the effect was to fire a train already laid in most countries of western Europe. The outcome in different countries depended on differences in their economic and political development. Generally speaking, in countries poor in natural resources, such as north Germany, Scandinavia and Scotland, the whole

laity—feudal lords, bourgeoisie and peasants—resented the exactions of the Church and saw a chance to get their own back. These countries went solidly Protestant. In countries rich in natural resources, such as Italy and Spain with her new over-sea empire, the feudal lords and upper bourgeoisie had little or no reason to quarrel with the Church, and the Inquisition soon burnt out any heresy there was. The countries in between—south Germany, France, England and the Netherlands—saw the longest and fiercest struggles. In south Germany the violent repression that followed the Peasants' War practically finished the cause of the Reformation. The burghers, who had begun as enthusiastic Lutherans, became half-hearted; the peasants had nothing left to fight for; and in the second half of the sixteenth century Catholic reaction, directed by the Jesuits, had a walk-over. In England London and the south-east, where capitalism was rapidly developing, were Protestant, while the feudal north and west were Catholic. The result was a seesaw during the reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary and Elizabeth I, ending in the establishment of a Church which ever since has tried to reconcile incompatibles. In France the Protestants were strong among the lesser feudal lords and the bourgeoisie; but the monarchy and the greater lords had no wish to quarrel with the Pope and drive him into the arms of Spain. Thirty years of exhausting civil war ended in the Edict of Nantes and temporary toleration. In the Netherlands the Reformation was identified with the national revolt against Spain. In the end the feudal lords and rich bourgeois of the southern Netherlands sold out to Spain and remained Catholic, while the less rich burghers of the north founded the Protestant Dutch Republic.

The nature of Protestant theology varied correspondingly. To feudal monarchs the important thing was to control the Church in their own countries. If they could do this by arrangement with the Pope, as in France and Spain, all the better for them. If it meant getting rid of papal authority, as in England, they did so, but went no further with the Reformers than suited them. The bourgeoisie preferred, if

possible, to control the Churches in their own interest. This by no means suited the monarchs, and in the seventeenth century helped to produce a revolutionary situation in England and Scotland. The peasants wanted to be free from exploitation whether by feudal lords or by rich bourgeois. Failing that, it mattered little to them which religion won. The different balance of forces in different countries accounts for the varieties of Protestant belief.

To Luther, a Reformer of petty bourgeois origin, but dependent on the good will of German princes, the essential thing was to stop the Pope from picking German pockets by such devices as the indulgence traffic. His central dogma, therefore, was "justification by faith"—meaning that you were saved by your state of mind, not by forking out to the priest.

This stand made him a German national hero. In his early utterances he goes further and says that peasants and children "understand more of Jesus Christ than the Pope, the bishops or the doctors".¹ But after the Peasants' War he asks himself "whether it might not have been better to have allowed the Papacy to pursue its course unmolested than to be a witness to the breaking out of such commotions".² Thenceforth he is merely the kept theologian of the north German princes. In his last sermon in 1546 he calls reason "the devil's bride" and "an accursed whore".³

Similarly to the English Reformers, Cranmer, Ridley and Latimer, the main thing was to end the jurisdiction of the Pope "in this realm of England".⁴ Latimer went further and denounced the social injustices of his day, such as the expropriation of the peasantry, but in so doing was almost alone among ecclesiastics.

All these men had to back their onslaught on the Pope by an authority higher than his. They found this in the Bible, from which they showed that papal claims had no basis in the doctrine or practice of the early Church. The translation of

¹ D'Aubigné, *op. cit.*

² *Ibid.*

³ Beard, *Lectures on the Reformation*, V.

⁴ *Articles of Religion*, XXXVII.

the Bible into the vernacular tongues of modern Europe was the great gift of the Reformation to the world.

The chief attempt to reduce Protestantism to a coherent system was Calvin's. A French bourgeois and a fine scholar, he had to fly from France and settled at Geneva, where he became the paid preacher and confidential adviser of the rich citizens who had just kicked out their bishop and set up a self-governing republic. Calvin stretched theology to the utmost limit to which it can be stretched without breaking. God is all-knowing: therefore he knows and has determined in advance who will be saved and who damned. There is therefore no place in the scheme of things for popes, bishops or priests. Some irreverent person may interject that if everything is predestined, there is no use in having a Church at all. But he will be wrong. The true Church, for Calvin, is the congregation of the elect, governing themselves through ministers of their own choice. As Engels put it, "the kingdom of God was republicanised"¹—like the city of Geneva. But "republicanised" did not mean "democratised". The ministers elected under Calvin's system were to supervise new elections, exclude objectionable candidates, and expel from the Church all who by evil life or heretical opinions showed that they were not among the saved, but among the damned.

Calvinism was a very comforting doctrine to the rich citizens of Geneva, whom it enabled to run their own Church without the interference of prince or prelate and to discipline any trouble-maker who questioned their right to do so. And it was to be a very comforting doctrine to the seventeenth-century bourgeoisie in England and Scotland, who used it to prove that the industrious middle classes were the elect of God and to justify their struggle for power against the Stuart monarchs and the relics of the feudal system.

But there were Reformers who were not content with State Churches established and endowed by kings, princes or rich citizens to serve their convenience. The vernacular Bible became a weapon not only of the laity against priestcraft and

¹ Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, Introduction.

of the bourgeoisie against kingcraft, but of petty bourgeois and artisans against the imposition of any doctrine or ritual rejected by their "inner light". Already in the early days of the Reformation simple artisans who read Luther's New Testament found that there was no more warrant in it for infant baptism than for the mass, and no more warrant for the Trinity than for saint-worship; that according to the Gospels Jesus had forbidden his followers to take oaths or to bear arms; that according to the Acts the primitive Church had had all things common and distributed to each according to his need. They concluded that riches were unchristian, and that rulers who imposed unscriptural rites and doctrines should be resisted to the death by Christian men and women. These Anabaptists or "rebaptisers" (so-called from their practice of rebaptising those who joined them) were persecuted by Catholics and Protestants alike, hunted out of Germany and Switzerland into the Netherlands, and out of the Netherlands into England. Their one departure from strict pacifism, provoked by years of savage repression, was the seizure of power in 1534 in the German city of Münster. The orgy of vengeance that followed its recapture in 1535 ended them as a political force on the Continent. Finding that there was nothing to choose between Catholic, Lutheran and Calvinist persecutors, they abandoned the struggle and lost their importance as a sect. But in England, then in the van of economic and political development, they had a future.

By 1575 we find in East Anglia an artisan sect of Anabaptist origin called the Family of Love, who "attenuated all Scriptures into Allegories, and made them airy, empty nothing";¹ and another called the Family of the Mount, who "questioned whether there were an heaven or an hell, but what is in this life", and "believed that all things come by nature".² Anabaptism in fact sowed the seeds of popular free-thought. But the menace of the stake still deterred all but the boldest from such speculations. Most left-wing sectaries were

¹ Fuller, *Church History of Britain*.

² Strype, *Annals of the Reformation*.

content to insist on the right of each congregation to elect its own officers and manage its own affairs without the intervention of the State or its nominees, the bishops. By 1593 these Brownists (as they were called from their founder, Robert Browne) were estimated to number nearly twenty thousand. They were to win revolutionary fame in the next century under the name of Independents.

5. *The English Revolution*

The growing revolutionary situation in seventeenth-century England won for the left-wing sects a relaxation of persecution and finally full toleration. After 1612 no more heretics were burnt: the temper of the people was too dangerous.¹ They were still liable to imprisonment, pillorying, whipping, branding and other forms of annoyance. In 1640 the Long Parliament met; and in 1642 the Civil War began.

Neither side had at first any idea of allowing dissent in religion. Doctrinal uniformity seemed as necessary to Parliament as to Charles I and Laud, though they differed as to the kind of religion to be imposed. The Cavaliers objected to the Calvinist republicanism of the kingdom of God. "We who are now governed by the canon and civil law dispensed by twenty-six ordinaries"²—said the gentlemen of Cheshire to the Long Parliament—"should become exposed to the mere arbitrary government of a numerous Presbytery, who, together with their ruling elders, will arise to near forty thousand Church governors. . . . The consequences would prove the utter loss of learning and laws, which must necessarily produce an extermination of nobility, gentry and order, if not of religion."³ The city of London on the other hand was

¹ The last victim, the Anabaptist Edward Wightman at Lichfield, was nearly rescued by the crowd. Laud, as chaplain to the bishop of Lichfield, was active in the proceedings against Wightman.

² Bishops.

³ Cheshire petition to the House of Lords, cited by Gardiner, *History of England*, XCVI.

Presbyterian, because "by filling the elderships those very merchants and tradesmen constituted the Church for purposes of jurisdiction. Whatever ecclesiastical tyranny there was would be exercised by themselves".¹

But Parliament had to enlist to fight for it those yeomen and tradesmen of East Anglia whose fathers had been in the van of the Reformation, and who ever since then had been learning to think for themselves on the data at their disposal. High among those data ranked the English Bible; and they read it against a background of hard work to which the courtiers of Whitehall and the gentry at Westminster were alike strangers. Some were Independents; some were Anabaptists who felt that at last they had a cause to fight for; a few—but as yet only a few—were indifferent to all Churches. All were agreed in denying the right of any earthly authority to prescribe their opinions, or of any established Church to tithe them for its support. With John Milton they held that "New Presbyter is but Old Priest writ large".

The quarrel came to a head after victory in the Civil War. The chief Parliamentary leaders, backed by the London merchants and their Scottish allies, demanded the establishment and enforcement of Presbyterianism. The New Model army (and thousands not in the army) demanded freedom of conscience, abolition of tithes and payment of ministers of religion by voluntary contributions. These demands developed into the Leveller movement—the first democratic movement in modern history—which in 1647 frightened Parliament out of its wits and shook the authority of Cromwell himself. The rejection of the Leveller programme by Cromwell (who had tried to mediate between Parliament and the army) and his subsequent forcible suppression of the Levellers ended the only democratic phase of the English Revolution. The yeomen and tradesmen who had followed Cromwell to victory at Marston Moor and Naseby had nothing left to fight for, and after his death allowed Charles II to be restored without a struggle. But the New Model could boast that it had saved

¹ Gardiner, *History of the Civil War*, XL.

England not only from Laudian, but from Calvinist oppression. A by-product of the defeat of the Levellers and consequent disillusionment with the Revolution was the foundation of George Fox's Society of Friends, who in reliance on their "inner light" rejected with equal emphasis both tyranny and the waging of war against it. Both John Lilburne, the Leveller, and Gerrard Winstanley, the Digger, ended their days in the Society of Friends.¹

The Restoration, though formally it re-established the monarchy and the Anglican Church, and for a time imposed penalties on dissent, proved in practice the inability of king or Church to stand up to the capitalists who now held effective power. The attempts of Charles II and James II to restore absolute monarchy by openly promoting Catholics and secretly collaborating with Louis XIV alienated the bourgeoisie who had brought them back, and involved their dynasty in final shipwreck. The "glorious Revolution" of 1688 ended at one blow autocracy in the State and the Anglican monopoly in religion.

By the Toleration Act of 1689 all Protestant Nonconformists—Presbyterians, Baptists,² Independents, Friends—became free to worship as they liked, though down to 1828 they were excluded from Parliament and from public office. Penalties were still imposed—and theoretically may be imposed to this day—for denying the truth of Christianity or the divine authority of the Bible. But in practice the bourgeoisie could be deists or even atheists, provided they kept their deism or their atheism a class secret. The Blasphemy Acts were used only against writers or speakers who threatened to unsettle the masses, and in our generation have ceased to

¹ The affiliation of the Society of Friends to the Anabaptists is shown among other things by Fox's famous cry, "Woe to the bloody city of Lichfield," as he walked through the streets early in his mission. He must have known of the burning of Wightman a generation before.

² "Baptist" is only a shorter form of "Anabaptist". To assist in winning toleration and bourgeois respectability the sect seem to have shed the prefix as an undesirable link with their revolutionary past. Doubtless for much the same reason modern Independents prefer to be known as Congregationalists.

be used at all. Their maintenance on the statute book as a weapon in reserve to protect dogmas in which the ruling class themselves have very largely ceased to believe is one of the many contradictions of capitalism.

III

Humanism into Marxism

1. *The Rise of Modern Humanism*

It is evident from the last chapter that the bourgeoisie have a two-faced attitude to religion. On the one hand their rise as a class necessitated the overthrow and expropriation of the largest feudal landowner, the Catholic Church, in the countries where they first won power. On the other hand, since the bourgeoisie is itself an exploiting class, it has an interest in establishing and endowing some form of religion. The particular brand varies with circumstances. It may be Lutheran, Anglican or Calvinist; and the history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries shows that to procure a united front against Socialism the bourgeoisie are not above a deal with their old enemy, the Catholic Church. But whatever the brand and whatever their private beliefs, they publicly support Christianity and identify capitalism with "Christian civilisation".

But it is beyond the power of the bourgeoisie to confine the battle of ideas within arbitrary limits. Once the power of the Catholic Church was broken, there was no logical halting-place short of atheistic humanism—the assertion of human interests (to the exclusion of hypothetical divine interests) as the final criterion of theory and practice.

Side by side with the development of class society, culminating in the rise of modern capitalism, has gone the development of science. Both have their roots in the improvement of productive equipment. Scientific discovery had already gone some way in antiquity, but was hampered by the slave basis of ancient society, which discouraged practical experiment and exalted arm-chair philosophies such as those of Plato and Aristotle. But the emergence of a capitalist economy at the end of the Middle Ages led to the rapid development of science. With the need to open up new trade routes, and the consequent discovery of America and the sea route to India, came the need of accurate and easily manageable astronomical tables for use in ocean navigation. The Ptolemaic astronomy based on the motion of the heavenly bodies round the earth, and supported by Aristotle and the Bible, had held the field through the Middle Ages, since medieval navigators were seldom or never out of sight of land, and rough and ready reckonings sufficed. Ocean voyages altered all that. The inadequacy of the Ptolemaic system was already apparent when Copernicus, a Polish priest who had studied astronomy in Italy, set himself to work out a simpler system based on the motion of the earth on its axis, and of the earth and the other planets round the sun. He never thought of attacking the Church: he dedicated his book to the Pope. But once it was admitted that the Bible was wrong on one point—the stationary position of the earth in the universe—who could tell where that would end? So, although tables based on the system of Copernicus were in use soon after his death, the Church would not allow that system to be taught as true.

Again, the use of fire-arms in war, among other factors, made necessary a more accurate knowledge of the human body for the purposes of surgery and medicine. This greatly stimulated the growth of a scientific attitude to the world. Medicine differs from other learned professions in being also a handicraft. The Church and the law can indulge in fiction with impunity; but a doctor who bases his practice on fiction kills his patients. Hence doctors led the way in undermining

superstition. Even in the Middle Ages there was a proverb: "Where there are three doctors, there are two atheists." We all remember Chaucer's "doctor of physic" whose "studie was but litel on the Bible". When a doctor *did* study the Bible, the results were likely to be awkward for the Bible or for the doctor. A doctor, Servetus, who anticipated Harvey's discovery of the circulation of the blood, also exploded the dogma of the Trinity and was burnt in Calvin's Geneva. Another doctor, Johann Weier, was the first modern critic of the superstition of witchcraft.

Since the rising bourgeoisie and their governments needed science for navigation, for war and, as time went on, for industry generally, science went ahead and with it the habit of relying on observation and experiment rather than on the Bible or any other ancient authority. Not that the pioneers of science usually rejected the established religion. They usually conformed to it. Galileo did not want to attack the Catholic Church; but the Church, terrified of the consequences of admitting that the Bible could err, would not let him alone. Newton, who completed the work of Galileo by formulating the laws of motion, was a devout Protestant, though doubts about the Trinity prevented him from taking orders. But whatever homage scientists might pay to the religion in which they had been brought up, a picture of the world in which the reign of law was universal, and the earth only one planet of one sun among millions of suns, made it increasingly difficult to believe in a God who took any special interest in the doings of men and women. Spinoza, the greatest philosopher of the seventeenth century, saw the impossibility, and though he continued to use the word "God", in fact identified God with nature. Even to assume God as the First Cause who set the world-machine in motion (a last ditch occupied by some theists to this day) was to make him in effect a constitutional monarch who reigned, but did not govern—a God who had doubtless originated the laws of nature, but did not dispense with them daily as traditional religion pictured him doing. This desiccated theology—deism—was very fashionable among

the British bourgeoisie of the early eighteenth century, who had just reduced their earthly monarch to an equally innocuous status. The fundamentalist gospel of Wesley and Whitefield, with its crude appeal to the hope of heaven and the fear of hell, was repulsive to the Established Church. Its preachers were barred from the pulpits and slowly forced into secession.

If deism—from which it was only a step to materialism—was popular with the British bourgeoisie, still more was it popular in continental countries where the battle against feudalism had yet to be won. Feudal privileges were interlocked with the dogma of a God who had ordained princes to bear the sword and priests to remit sin. Naturally the spokesmen of the French bourgeoisie in the eighteenth century, Voltaire, Rousseau and the Encyclopaedists, went for that theology hammer and tongs. But the position of the bourgeoisie on the Continent, as in England, was contradictory. They wanted to abolish feudalism, but to safeguard bourgeois property. Hence most of them stopped short of a total rejection of religion. Rarely did a radical thinker like Diderot or Holbach declare God an unnecessary hypothesis and mutual aid a sufficient social sanction. The position of most of the bourgeoisie was expressed in the frank epigram of Voltaire: "If God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent him."

The idea of a minimum religion essential to social order was further developed in the writings of Rousseau, and found ingenious expression in the philosophy of Kant. Kant knew well that theology could not stand up to "theoretical reason". He therefore proved by idealist arguments—already used for apologetic purposes by Berkeley, but reduced by Kant to a formal precision of which the Irish bishop was incapable—that the whole world of common sense and of science existed only in the mind. Such arguments are unconvincing to those who live by handling the material world and shaping it to human purposes. No farmer sowing seed, no sailor navigating by the stars believes that "the whole choir of heaven and

furniture of the earth"¹ exist only in his mind. But idealism is a fascinating *tour de force* for arm-chair philosophers who divorce theory from practice. Kant, in his own words, "abolished *knowledge* to make room for *belief*".² He made room, not by "theoretical", but by "practical reason", for just those beliefs which the bourgeoisie found necessary to their security and comfort—an absolute moral law, a God who was the source of that law, and a future life in which the wrongs of this world would be righted. That most people are forced by equally "practical reason" to make room for the land on which they labour, the food and drink which they consume, and the means of production which they use, did not occur to the Königsberg professor.

2. *The French Revolution and After*

This two-faced attitude to religion found practical expression in the French Revolution of 1789. The bourgeoisie, represented by the National Assembly and later by the National Convention, unceremoniously expropriated the feudal lords and the Catholic Church, sold their property to enrich themselves, and from 1792 on successfully fought half Europe to defend their gains. But to do so they had—like the English Long Parliament in its day—to arm and drill peasants and artisans who would have seen no point in a Revolution that did everything for the bourgeoisie and nothing for *them*. To fight foreign invaders the Revolutionary leaders had to make concessions to the masses. The Girondins, who would not make concessions, had to make way for the Jacobins, who did. But concessions stopped short of tolerating attacks on bourgeois property or the open propagation of atheism. Left-wing revolutionaries—Cloots, Chaumette and so on—who transgressed these limits went in 1794 to the guillotine as unpitied as any king, noble, priest or other enemy of the

¹ Berkeley, *Principles of Human Knowledge*.

² Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, preface to second edition.

nation. Finally, once the gains of the Revolution were safe, Robespierre, the devout deist, was guillotined in his turn and the Jacobins suppressed. Napoleon Bonaparte was called in to protect the bourgeoisie from enemies of the right or left, and the Catholic Church was eventually re-established under State control as a licensed retailer of opium to the people.¹

The supreme theoretical expression of this attitude to religion is the philosophy of Hegel. Anyone who picks up a work of Hegel will find it peppered with words like "God", "spirit" and so on. He may conclude that Hegel is a pious Christian. He will be wrong. Hegel is no Christian. He takes over the idealist philosophy of Kant, according to which the world exists only in and for mind, but instead of (like Kant) giving the name "God" to an unknowable being behind phenomena, he gives that name (as Spinoza had done) to the world-process itself. Thus history to Hegel is nothing but the unfolding of the divine ideas. They unfold by a process called "dialectic"—a word which sounds formidable to the uninitiated, but is only a new label for the old fact that nothing stays put. "The old order changeth, yielding place to new"—its antithesis or negation. The new in its turn grows old and yields place to a yet newer—which, as it is the result of its two predecessors, may be called their synthesis or "the negation of negation". The beauty of Hegelian philosophy is that it can mean quite different things to different people. A Hegelian can publicly profess Christianity and even Trinitarian Christianity (thesis, antithesis and synthesis doing duty as Father, Son and Holy Ghost) while really believing in nothing except the logic of events which has made the world what it is and not otherwise. To apply the name "God" to the world-process itself is to deprive the word of any specific meaning; and its continued use is purposeless except as a camouflage for intellectuals who believe in

¹ Napoleon's view appears in his remark: "Don't talk to me of men without God. I knew men without God in 1793. You don't govern men like that; you shoot them."

free-thought for themselves, but in religion for everybody else.

By the nineteenth century, in fact, religion in Europe had become intellectually out of date. But it remained indispensable to the ruling classes as an opium for the people. Still more is this the case today. Anyone who doubts this judgment may verify it by studying the religious half-column published every Saturday in *The Times*, in which one traditional dogma after another (the ascension, the second advent, the last judgment, the life of the world to come) is explained away for the benefit of the "top people" who take that paper—the literal meaning demolished and a string of words substituted which on logical analysis means nothing at all. Or he may save himself that trouble by asking any Christian capitalist to reconcile the Gospel injunctions—"resist not him that is evil"; "love your enemies"; "lay not up for yourselves treasures upon the earth"; and "judge not, that ye be not judged"—with production for profit, retributive punishment and nuclear warfare. Simple people who have not thought the question out may sincerely believe the traditional creeds. But so far as its bourgeois upholders are concerned, the religion established and endowed by law, taught in publicly maintained schools and broadcast on the radio today is organised hypocrisy.

The bogus character of established religion was already evident—though not so evident as today—when Hegel prostituted his philosophy in its defence. History was proving in forcible fashion that nothing stayed put. Side by side with the French Revolution and its sequel went the industrial revolution which temporarily made Britain the workshop of the world, but which put questions to the bourgeoisie that all their philosophy could not answer. To the mass of misery and revolt following on unregulated industrial capitalism the ruling class reply was either to proclaim the unfettered pursuit of personal profit an automatic recipe for the greatest happiness of the greatest number, or—as this was not evident to the "greatest number" of those concerned—to refurbish in

the service of social order those dogmas of "revealed" religion which the theoreticians of the bourgeoisie had for more than a century been busily undermining. From the French Revolution onwards Evangelical Christianity (till then derided as Methodist cant) became respectable in England and even fashionable. Shrewd foreign observers declared that Methodism had saved England from revolution. The interests of the working class, which by this time, at least in Britain and France, were visibly opposed to those of the bourgeoisie, demanded that the bluff should be called.

Only here and there as yet did individuals—Owen in Britain, Saint-Simon and Fourier in France—perceive that the remedy for social ills lay not in reviving a moribund religion, but in building a co-operative commonwealth adapted to large-scale production and distribution. To Owen's followers we owe the word "Socialism"—a fact worth pondering by those who would trace to Methodism the origin of British Socialism. To Owen and his fellow-Utopians belongs the credit of having put their finger on the problem. But they did not know how to solve it.

Hegelian philosophy, as we have seen, served Hegel himself and many of his followers as an intellectual excuse for supporting the established order and its official religion. But not all Hegelians were so compliant. A philosophy of history which saw in the past an inevitable progress from the old order to the new and from the new to the newer could obviously be applied with revolutionary results to the present and future by anyone not inhibited by personal interest or a professorial post. Carlyle, idealist though he was, put the case in the closing pages of his *French Revolution* in words that today sound prophetic. "Sansculottism¹ . . . still lives; still works far and wide, through one bodily shape into another less amorphous, as is the way of cunning Time with his New-Births:—till, in some perfected shape, it embrace the whole circuit of the world!"

¹ *Sansculottes* ("ragamuffins") was the name given to the artisan supporters of the Revolution in derision, and then accepted as a title of honour.

This was written in 1837. In a few years two materialists showed how the idealist's prophecy was to be fulfilled.

3. *Marxism in Theory*

In 1844, when industrial capitalism was completely victorious in Britain and France, but had hardly scratched the surface of the greater part of Europe, two young "Hegelians of the left"—Marx, who had been engaged in radical journalism in Paris, and Engels, who had been writing on the condition of the working class in England—made each other's acquaintance. Independently they had come to the conclusion that human progress, social, political and intellectual, depended on the victory and extension to other countries of the working-class movements then stirring Britain and France. During nearly forty years of collaboration they gave the working class and the world the new philosophy of dialectical materialism, and called the triple bluff of bourgeois religion, bourgeois philosophy and bourgeois political economy.

Marx and Engels called the religious and philosophical bluff of the bourgeoisie by pointing out that before people can think, let alone worship, they must live—that is, get food, drink, shelter, clothing and the other necessities of life. But now begins the distinctive contribution of Marx and Engels to materialist philosophy. Man, they point out, acts on and changes the world to which he belongs. Ideas are part of the equipment by which he does so. History, therefore, is not a mere unfolding of ideas, but a series of struggles to change our world—struggles in particular between social classes for the product of human labour. The property relations prevalent in a society depend on the stage of development of its productive equipment. The legal, political, religious and other ideas current in a society depend in their turn on its property relations. "It is men who, in developing their material production and their material intercourse, change, along with this their real existence, their thinking

and the products of their thinking. Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life."¹ Hence there is no eternal and immutable moral law or religious truth. Morals and religion are creations of concrete society.

Marx and Engels called the economic bluff of the bourgeoisie by proving from documentary evidence provided by the bourgeoisie themselves that the freedom of every man to buy in the cheapest market and sell in the dearest meant not the greatest happiness of the greatest number, but the increasing exploitation of the working class for the profit of the owning class, the increasing instability of the capitalist system and the inevitability of its overthrow by the workers of the world when they awoke to their situation. Against bourgeois economists who treated capitalism as a law of nature, Marx and Engels showed that it was a product of history doomed by its own contradictions to disappear.

Finally, by showing the historical connection between class society and religion, Marx and Engels proved the impossibility—whatever bourgeois free-thinkers might say—of abolishing religion without first abolishing class society and the helpless and hopeless ways of thought which it fosters in its victims. This is worth pondering by those present-day humanists who (like Bruno Bauer and the "critical critics" of Marx's day) think that they can eradicate religion by argument alone. Marx put the matter succinctly in his *Theses on Feuerbach*. "Philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it."

• In the lifetime of Marx and Engels their theory of class struggles as the motive force in history was reinforced by Darwin's demonstration that man himself, with all his characteristics, had evolved from an animal ancestry by natural selection in the struggle for existence. Darwin himself drew no political conclusions from his theory. But incautious apologists for capitalism, then and since, have hailed the *Origin of Species* as a scientific justification of free competition. They fail to see that the Socialism to which they object is as much a

¹ Marx and Engels, *German Ideology*.

response to environment as the capitalism which they approve. Man lives by co-operation: only so can he survive. The particular form taken by co-operation depends on historical circumstances. Given the struggle for existence, any human group uses the social, political and ideological weapons that suit it. Ancient slave-owners used the city-State, and when that failed them, the empires of antiquity, culminating in the great slave-empire of Rome. Feudal landowners used the Catholic Church and the divine right of kings. Capitalists use free competition and parliamentary government, but as events have shown, are equally ready, when and where it suits them, to use trusts, combines and fascist dictatorships. If the workers in their turn use trade unions, co-operative societies, Socialist and Labour Parties, Communist Parties, Soviet Republics and People's Republics, these are, one and all, weapons in the struggle for existence which prove their fitness by survival.

Since the closing years of the nineteenth century a favourite argument of the opponents of Marxism has been the alleged falsification of its predictions. Marx—the argument runs—deduced from his analysis of capitalist production that the rich would grow richer, the poor poorer, and the middle class be crushed out between the upper and nether millstones, until in the final crisis of capitalism “the knell of capitalist private property sounds”, and “the expropriators are expropriated”.¹ What are the facts? Statistics prove that the standard of living has risen. Trade unionism, co-operation and reformist legislation won by working-class organisation and struggle have raised wages, reduced hours and established social services unknown in the past. The middle class, far from being crushed out, become more numerous at every census. Since the predictions have been falsified, the analysis, it is argued, must be wrong, and Marxism can be relegated to the museum of exploded philosophies.

These criticisms arise either from a hearsay acquaintance with Marxism or from the memorising of one or two “purple

¹ Marx, *Capital*, XXIV, 7.

passages" by those who have never followed the process of Marx's thought. He and Engels were well aware of the qualifications needed in applying their theory to particular cases. As early as 1858 Engels wrote to Marx that the exploitation of "the whole world" was leading in England to "a bourgeois aristocracy and a bourgeois proletariat *as well as a bourgeoisie*", and Marx anticipated that the extension of capitalism to new countries—Australia, the western United States, China, Japan—would postpone social revolution in Europe.¹ Obviously the creation of a "bourgeois proletariat" at home by exploiting new countries, so far as it succeeds (and it would be foolish to deny it local and temporary successes), is only robbing Peter to pay Paul. Marx never lived to finish *Capital*. But in the draft of a fourth volume, published by Kautsky after both he and Engels were dead, Marx expressly refers to that "continual increase in numbers of the middle classes", and its effect in increasing the "security and power of the upper class",² which his critics accuse him of overlooking. As to political prophecy, in 1870—in the hour of German victory over France—Marx wrote: "What the Prussian fools do not see is that the present war is leading . . . inevitably to a war between Germany and Russia . . . A war No. 2 of this kind will act as the midwife to the inevitable social revolution in Russia."³ Lucky accident or long-term prevision?

Far from exaggerating the catastrophic effects of capitalism, Marx and Engels in fact understated them. They saw that the industrialization of new countries would postpone social upheaval in Europe. They did not see—and could not see without a foreknowledge of the future development of warlike weapons—that the scramble of capitalist powers for colonies and concessions in undeveloped countries, the partitioning of Africa, the opening up of Asia, and the military rivalries

¹ *Marx-Engels Correspondence*, letters of 7–8 October, 1858.

² *Theories of Surplus Value*, cited by Bottomore and Rubel, *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, Part III, 5.

³ *Marx-Engels Correspondence*, Marx to Sorge, 1 September, 1870.

and alliances thereby necessitated would be so many milestones to the most murderous war yet waged by civilized governments. (Lenin lived to see it and, besides his practical achievement, brought Marx and Engels up to date by developing Marxism to cover imperialism and world war.) They did not and could not see that the congenital inability of those same capitalist powers to make and keep peace, coupled with terror at the spectre of Socialism—now become concrete in the Soviet Union—would twenty years later cause a second world war more murderous than the first. They did not and could not see that those same capitalist powers, having by a second world war unintentionally ensured the spread of Socialism over one-third of the world, would to prevent its further spread prepare to murder half mankind¹ and to infect the rest with plague, pestilence and famine for untold generations. In short, Marx and Engels foresaw the breakdown of capitalism and the victory of Socialism, but did not foresee the criminal and even lunatic lengths to which the capitalists would go to prevent it. Marx's prediction of economic "misery, oppression, slavery, degradation and exploitation",² preceding final revolt, pales into insignificance beside the deeds of horror which Christian capitalists have already done, and which they brag of their readiness to do again and outdo.

4. *Marxism in Practice*

It is against this capitalist record of the last fifty years that we must assess the Socialist record of the Soviet Union, eastern Europe and China.

Critics of Marxism (from the Jesuit Father Wetter to the older school of Rationalists) often say that Marxism is itself a religion as dogmatic as those which it seeks to supersede. Nor is the idea that Marxism is a religion wholly confined

¹ Even this is an understatement. As I write, Professor Kissinger of the U.S.A. talks glibly of "blowing up the world" in defence of capitalism.

² Marx, *Capital*, XXIV, 7.

to its critics. Various writers who accept most of the Marxist positions have used the word "religion" to describe them. Belfort Bax—the friend of Engels and Morris and in great measure a Marxist, though an idealist in philosophy—wrote a book (in some respects still valuable) called *The Religion of Socialism*, in which he contended that Socialism, though not religious in the other-worldly sense, had brought back religion from heaven to earth and equated it with the struggle for a higher social life. "In Socialism the current antagonisms are abolished, the separation between politics and religion has ceased to be, since their object-matter is the same."¹ More recently Dr. Hewlett Johnson, the Dean of Canterbury, has argued that Communism is not only religious, but reconcilable with Christianity, since both Christians and Communists believe in something greater than themselves which will eventually triumph. Christians call this something God and Christ; Communists call it history and working-class solidarity. "Both of us, Christians and Communists, operate in a common field of religion. For the field of relationships is the field of religion; the field of human relationships."²

Up to a point it is a question of terms. If anyone likes to call a firmly held conviction which moves us to action a "religion", we cannot stop him. But such a use of the word is confusing. If "religion" is to be used in this sense, we need some other word to describe Judaism, Christianity, Islam and the other religions usually so called. Historically, "religion" has been used to mean the recognition of a super-human power or powers entitled to obedience. Marxism is a materialist philosophy. For Marxists our knowledge arises wholly from experience—from the world acting on us and from our reacting on the world. That being so, the supernatural—a hypothetical being or beings beyond the world—is unknowable and on strict analysis unthinkable. To use the word "religion" to denote both supernaturalism and the

¹ Bax, *The Religion of Socialism*, essay on "Socialism and Religion".

² Hewlett Johnson, *Christians and Communism*, XIII.

rejection of supernaturalism is to rob the word "religion" of any useful significance.

However, the critics of Marxism have in mind more than mere terminology. They point to the authority accorded in Communist Parties to the writings of Marx, Engels and Lenin, to the belief in the historic mission of the working class, to the discipline accepted by Party members and to the power concentrated in the State wherever Communists govern. Having enumerated these, the critic exclaims: "A canon of scripture, a mystical faith, an infallible Church, an Index! What more do you want to make a religion? It might be Rome, save for the trifling difference that there is no God."

The answer to those critics who say that we treat the writings of Marx, Engels and Lenin as an infallible Bible is that we do not. We accept their writings in so far as they correspond with experience. It needs no revelation to know that people live by labour; that if they do not live by their own labour, they must live by that of other people; that in capitalist society the usual way of living by the labour of other people is to own the means by which they labour (or a share in it) and draw rent, interest or profit from it; and that as a matter of fact there has been and is a ceaseless struggle between the class who live by working and the class who live by owning—a struggle sometimes industrial, sometimes political, sometimes national, sometimes international. It needs no revelation to know that only the workers collectively, guided by right theory, can end capitalism and build Socialism—just as it needs no revelation to know that an army must be properly led and must fight in order to win. These Marxist positions are not inspired scripture. They are generalisations from experience to be tested in practice. If it entertains any critic to count the predictions by Marx which were not fulfilled, let him. I have pointed to some which were.

As to those critics who see a religion in the discipline accepted by Communists, I ask them whether they see a religion in the discipline accepted by the armed forces on service. Marxists are not mere debaters defending a theory.

The world is not a debating society, but an arena in which men struggle for existence, and in which they may either join forces in a collective battle with nature or waste them in mutual war until nature finishes off the survivors by pestilence and famine. The twentieth century in two world wars has put the alternative to mankind. Marxists choose the first alternative—the collective battle with nature, or as we say, building Socialism. Building Socialism is an operation in which efforts must be co-ordinated if we are to succeed. The Communist Party is “the most advanced and resolute section of the working-class parties of every country”.¹ In this it resembles an army—not of conscripts, like other armies, but of volunteers. And, like an army, the Party too needs discipline. It asks of its members, however, not the *unthinking* submission which the Catholic Church imposes on believers, but the *thinking* co-operation necessary to success in a common enterprise.

A Communist Party is governed by a Central Committee freely elected by its members, and which the members can replace if they disagree with its policy. We do not consider any leader infallible. Nowhere in any Marxist classic—nowhere in Marx, nowhere in Engels, nowhere in Lenin, nowhere even in Stalin—is infallibility claimed. Communists support their leaders as an army in the field supports its generals—with this difference, that generals are not elected, and our leaders are. A fighting man on service does not think his officers infallible (his opinion of them may be unprintable!) but he does not mutiny in face of the enemy. Neither do we. It is a little naïve of our critics to complain that we do not make them a free present of controversial ammunition.

I am not taking up the cudgels for Stalin or Rakosi. I know that these men were responsible for actions which did much harm to the Socialism I nevertheless think they were trying to serve and up to a point *did* serve. But does anyone imagine that people building a new society in the middle of a hostile world can renounce the use of force? The French Revolutionists, building a new bourgeois society in the face

¹ Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto*.

of feudal Europe, used force enough. Then, as now, the reactionaries lifted their hands in holy horror. Then, as now, half-hearted sympathisers with the Revolution scuttled to the enemy camp. We Communists are proud to be the heirs, not of the turncoats Burke, Wordsworth and Southey, but of plucky Tom Paine, himself a prisoner under the Terror, who died as he had lived, a Revolutionist.

IV

Religion and the Labour Movement

1. *Background of the British Labour Movement*

In applying Marxist principles to the situation in Britain it is necessary to remember that Britain is the oldest capitalist country. Feudalism in England was blown sky-high by the Revolution of the seventeenth century. Its last living relics in Scotland—the feudal privileges of the Highland chiefs—were abolished after the rising of 1745. Thenceforth the British bourgeoisie were free to turn their energies from civil struggles to the exploitation of the advantages which they had won. The comfortable and comatose Church of eighteenth-century England sufficed to sanctify their proceedings while they got rich by the ruthless exploitation of the common people and of subject races. Those petty bourgeois sects—Baptists, Congregationalists, Quakers—which had broken away in the revolutionary period were cut off from the Establishment by barriers at least as much social as religious.

With the application of science to industry and agriculture went the growth of the proletariat. The Enclosure Acts of the eighteenth century converted the yeomanry into

landless labourers or paupers, and drove them and their children by the thousand into the new cotton mills which the industrial revolution called to life. Before the end of the century the British Labour Movement was born—at first in blind revolt against the new machinery, in which the workers saw the immediate cause of their distress; then in combinations to regulate wages and hours, which the master class in 1799 found it necessary to forbid by Act of Parliament.

So far science had hardly begun to be applied to the investigation of human society, and what we now call a Marxist approach to its problems was not yet possible. Philosophy, history and political economy were ideological weapons of the bourgeoisie against religious dogmas which fettered their freedom of thought, or commercial restrictions which fettered their freedom of trade. No one dreamt that their lessons would ever be turned into weapons against the bourgeoisie itself. Only after the French Revolution had shown that free-thought could not be confined to the bourgeoisie, and that free-thinking artisans could be very dangerous people—only after the writings of Tom Paine and William Cobbett had begun to circulate among the masses, and after Owen at New Lanark had founded schools on a secularist basis, did the ruling class begin to take an interest in popular education.

It would be ridiculous to say with Morgan Phillips that the British Labour Movement owes more to Methodism than to Marxism. Wesley himself was a Tory whose only complaint against the Church of England was its impotence to provide an opium of sufficient strength for the growing proletariat. His followers were forced out of the Church by no action of their own. As late as 1811, following a strike in the Northumberland and Durham coalfields, a Methodist preacher at Jarrow fulminated against the miners' union (illegal under the Combination Acts) as "unchristian and immoral". As late as 1819, the year of Peterloo, a conference of Methodist ministers at Bristol admonished the workers not to be led by

"unreasonable and wicked men" into "political parties and associations" inconsistent with their "civil and religious duties".¹ J. R. Stephens, a leading Chartist and advocate of the ten-hour day in factories, had been a Methodist minister; but the Methodists had expelled him before he became a Chartist.

Yet the Methodists and other dissenting sects by the very fact of their separation from the Church of England were forced to rely for support on their own members and were therefore more amenable than the Establishment to pressure from below. The actual degree of self-government varied in different denominations. Baptist, Independent and Quaker congregations had been self-governing from the first. The Wesleyans, who had separated with the greatest reluctance from the Church of England, were far slower in admitting the laity to control of their affairs. The Calvinistic Methodists, following Whitefield rather than Wesley and flourishing mainly in Wales, adopted congregational self-government at an early date. Lay initiative was the issue that led to the secession from the Wesleyans of the Primitive Methodists and the Bible Christians. This growth of democratic dissent frightened Parliament into voting a million pounds in 1818 to build Anglican churches, and half a million pounds in 1824 for the same purpose. Vilely as the bourgeoisie treated the workers' bodies in the first fine careless capture of industrial capitalism, they were not negligent of their immortal souls!

The upshot was that by 1827, when the Owenites coined the word "Socialism" to denote their objective of the common ownership of the means of production, British workers were acquiring the habit of public discussion in dissenting chapels as well as in trade union branches, and that the British Labour Movement, unlike its continental counterpart, grew up with a religious background. In 1830, when the agricultural labourers of southern England revolted against starvation wages, a Nonconformist or Methodist schoolmaster

¹ J. L. and B. Hammond, *The Town Labourer*, XIII.

was sometimes found to speak for them—a clergyman of the Established Church never. Marxists must take account of such facts. To fail to do so and to put the fight against religion before the fight against capitalism is to fall into idealist error.

2. The Class Struggle and the Churches

The correct Marxist approach to the matter is indicated in the writings of Lenin. There can be no abandonment of the materialist basis of Marxism. A Marxist party must oppose the State granting privilege to religion in any shape or form. We must expose the religious halo artificially surrounding the head of the State for what it is—an opium deliberately manufactured to stupefy the masses and to blind them to the squalid realities of class society. We must demand the disestablishment and disendowment of all State Churches; the secularisation of all publicly aided schools; the repeal of all legislation which, like the blasphemy laws, penalises people on religious grounds; and the cessation of religious broadcasts, except as part and parcel of debates in which religious and anti-religious speakers take part on equal terms. In making these demands we shall have the support of some decent believers who do not share the common bourgeois assumption that the State should actively support religion.

But there is all the difference in the world between making such demands and wantonly repelling those believers who are with us in the fight against capitalism. "If a priest", wrote Lenin in 1909, "comes to co-operate with us in our work—if he conscientiously performs party work, and does not oppose the party programme—we can accept him into the ranks." True, Lenin considers such a case "hardly possible in Russia". But if he could imagine such a case in pre-Revolutionary Russia, where the Church was part of the Tsarist State machine, much more does the argument apply in

Britain, where ever since the Revolution of the seventeenth-century dissent from the State Church has been tolerated, where the Church itself has been extensively permeated by scientific criticism, and where an active minority (though never a majority) of the clergy have taken and are taking part in the struggle for Socialism and peace. We should be bad Marxists indeed if we refused the help of such men as Dr. Hewlett Johnson or Canon Collins for no better reason than that their beliefs do not square with dialectical materialism. The issue forced to the front by the capitalist policy of cold war—nothing less than the survival or destruction of mankind—is far too grave to be prejudiced by theoretical pedantry.

In short, we must put the class struggle first. The class struggle is not, as Tories and "revisionists" pretend, out of date. On the contrary, with the growth of monopoly capitalism the struggle has assumed a more tragic import than Marx and Engels envisaged: it has become a struggle for human survival. The demand of the workers of the world for a classless society has today to face, not the clumsy brutality of a Thiers or a Bismarck, nor the clever chicanery of a Chamberlain or a Churchill, but the desperate determination of big business tycoons and their political and military lackeys in the United States, Britain, Germany and France to destroy the world by mass murder and suicide sooner than see that classless society emerge. That is the grim reality behind all the hypocritical talk of "containment" and "the great deterrent".

Now not all workers are Marxists. Not all even know what Marxism is. But all workers and a great many who are not workers—all indeed who are not financially, politically or professionally implicated in monopoly capitalism's drive to mass murder and suicide—wish to live and not die, and wish their children after them to live and not die. Mankind stands at the cross-roads between life and death. Anyone who chooses life and not death—anyone who fights against capitalism and war, its offspring—is our friend. If he has

religious beliefs and likes to keep them, let him. We should not on that account refuse his help. If he is ready to work for the Party, we should not refuse him Party membership.

Anyone, on the other hand, who fights for capitalism and threatens the world with war in its defence, be he religious or irreligious, is our enemy. If we find in practice that the leaders of the Churches—popes, cardinals, archbishops and their kind—fight for capitalism and are ready to sanction even nuclear war in its defence, that is what as Marxists we should expect. In practice most capitalist States either have an Established Church of some kind or other—Catholic, Anglican, Calvinist, Lutheran as the case may be—or if for historical reasons they have not, nevertheless confer privileges on ministers of religion. The Church on its part corporately supports the State to which it owes its privileges and inculcates obedience to the government of the day.

The privileges conferred by capitalist States on the Churches in return for their support are exemplified in the history of popular education in this country. Until the nineteenth century neither the State nor the Church was interested in educating the people. In 1811, forced by the industrial revolution, the intensifying class struggle between capital and labour, and the consequent necessity of inoculating working-class children against dangerous thoughts, influential members of the ruling class founded a body called the National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church. After 1832 Parliament voted annual grants to the National Society and to the much smaller and poorer British and Foreign School Society, which had been founded by Nonconformists. But these societies between them catered only for a small fraction of the population. Most children were not educated at all. Then in 1870 growing foreign competition with British industry, plus the fact that urban workers had just won the Parliamentary franchise, made it necessary to provide elementary education out of the rates. These "provided" schools were authorised to give

religious instruction on condition that it was confined to doctrines assumed to be common to all Christians. The result was a dual system under which some children were educated in "denominational" schools provided by the Churches and subsidised by the taxpayers, and others in "undenominational" schools provided by the ratepayers. So it continued until 1902, when the further growth of foreign competition forced the State to provide not only elementary, but technical education. As a sop to the Churches, rate aid was now extended to their schools to enable them to hold their own in competition with those publicly provided. Finally in 1944 Parliament undertook to pay half the cost of maintaining denominational schools—a fraction now increased to three-quarters—and further required publicly provided schools to give religious instruction according to a syllabus agreed between local authorities and the Churches.

Thus, in a country of whose people only from ten to fifteen per cent, according to a Christian estimate, regularly attend any place of worship, and where Church leaders themselves admit the alienation of the masses from religion, more and more public money is voted for the teaching of a religion in which less and less people believe. Capitalists, whether they themselves believe the traditional creeds or not, believe their inculcation on the children of the workers to be an essential insurance against Socialism. The Trades Union Congress until 1912 used to demand a national system of education, free and secular, from the primary school to the university, but in 1912 under Catholic pressure removed the secularist plank from its programme. It is a sign of the degeneration of Social Democracy that so many Socialists, in this as in other matters, woo the "floating vote" by acquiescing in capitalist policy.

Naturally Churches so privileged by the capitalist State trail in the wake of capitalist statecraft. The Church of England is the State's obedient auxiliary. Its bishops are nominated by the government. Twenty-five of them sit in the House of Lords and help big landlords and big capitalists

to keep democracy safe for themselves. Episcopacy, like monarchy, is a fragment of feudalism which the bourgeoisie have adroitly adapted to their purposes and use to lend their rule an odour of sanctity and an air of pageantry that it otherwise lacks. This has not prevented a minority of lower clergy from throwing in their lot with the Labour Movement, or a few from even working with the Communist Party—to the grave scandal of their ecclesiastical superiors. But they are naturally a small minority.

The rôle assigned to the Church by the capitalist class was signally illustrated during the general strike of 1926. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Randall Davidson, cast himself for the part of mediator between the parties and, after consulting the Free Churches, appealed to the Tory Government to negotiate for a simultaneous cessation of the miners' lock-out and of the general strike which it had provoked. The Government refused even to allow him to broadcast his appeal. An attempt at mediation by a body of left-inclined Churchmen and Nonconformists, known as the Industrial Christian Fellowship, was rebuffed by the Government and ridiculed by the Press. There could have been no sharper reminder to the Church of her function as auxiliary policeman of the capitalist State. The attempt of William Temple during his short archiepiscopate (1942–1944) to engage the Church on the side of social change was censured by most defenders of the Establishment. Indeed, on Temple's death a Tory M.P. is said to have commented: "Thank God, we shall now have a Christian archbishop of Canterbury!" Temple's successor, the present archbishop, has shown the quality of his Christianity by publicly deprecating too much interest in the hydrogen bomb, since at its worst, according to his Grace, it can only send some millions of us a little sooner to the next world for which we are bound anyway.¹

The Catholic Church is an even more reliable buttress

¹ To his credit it must be added that Dr. Fisher has now endorsed Khrushchev's proposal for total disarmament. It remains to be seen whether this is a lasting conversion.

of capitalism than the Church of England. With the rise of monopoly capitalism has come a remarkable revival of Catholicism at the expense of other forms of Christianity. This is no accident. Ever since the French Revolution showed that the victory of the bourgeoisie over feudalism was merely the prelude to a new struggle between the victorious capitalists and the workers, the capitalist class have gradually forgotten their old quarrel with the Catholic Church and have sought its alliance against the new menace to class society. This trend was manifested in the Catholic revival within the Church of England; in the secession to Rome of Newman, Manning and many other clerics and laymen then and since; in Disraelian "Tory Democracy" with its rehabilitation of the monarchy and other feudal trappings of class rule; and in the tendency of bourgeois historians and novelists to whitewash lost causes of the past and to make out that revolution is always and everywhere wrong. In the nineteenth century, when the bourgeois revolution in Europe had yet to be completed, the process of reconciliation with Rome met with resistance among the bourgeoisie and was therefore difficult and slow. But in the twentieth, with Socialism victorious over one-third of the earth, the process has gathered pace. The Catholic Church with its international organisation is the natural ally of monopoly capitalism against international Socialism.

Even before the turn of the century the Catholic Church had cast itself for the part of saviour of capitalism from Socialism. In the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, issued by Leo XIII in 1891 and said to have been inspired by Manning, the Pope shakes his holy head at the dreadful class struggle between capital and labour, and admonishes both to behave themselves. Of course he can have nothing to do with Socialism: that is robbery. The landlord is entitled to his land, the capitalist to his capital. (The Pope could say no less.) But the landlord and the capitalist must be generous, give to charity and pay a living wage. Thus the Pope contrives to appear neutral in the class struggle, leaving the capitalist

to acclaim his thunder against the Red Peril, and the worker (if not seduced by agitators) to touch his cap gratefully for his "charter".

Forty years passed. The First World War was won and lost. Out of it came the Russian Revolution. Out of the fear of Socialism came the Fascism of Mussolini and the Lateran Treaty, which compensated the Pope for the loss of his temporal power and set up the Vatican State. Then in 1931, in the Encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*, Pius XI wrote the sequel to *Rerum Novarum*. A living wage must be paid; but due regard must be had to the state of business, which must not be ruined by excessive wages. (Those were the days of the great depression.) Favourable attention is drawn to the "corporative State" of Mussolini, in which strikes and lock-outs are forbidden and Socialism is suppressed as it should be. "Socialism, if it really remains Socialism, cannot be brought into harmony with the dogmas of the Catholic Church." For Socialism "affirms that human society was instituted merely for the sake of material well-being", whereas "true social authority . . . is not based on temporal and material well-being, but descends from God alone, the Creator and last end of all things . . . No one can be at the same time a sincere Catholic and a Socialist properly so called".

After all, one good turn deserves another. The Lateran Treaty earned a pat on the back for Fascism. Wherever capitalism continues, the Catholic Church will offer its aid in keeping the exploited masses ignorant, devout and docile, and will claim its pay from the capitalists in privilege and protection from attack. Any State that is ready to pay for the Church's aid—as most capitalist States are—is sure of a papal blessing. Any State that has no use for the Church's aid—and Socialist States naturally have none—is sure of a papal anathema. A world so scientifically organised as to need no opium for its people would be fatal to the Church. Against it the Papacy will fight to the last ditch.

This does not mean that Marxists should refuse the

co-operation of Catholics in struggles for wages and better conditions, as well as against dangers such as nuclear war which threaten our common humanity. We should welcome such co-operation, whoever offers it. But we must face the fact that it is in the last degree unlikely to be forthcoming from the Catholic hierarchy, and that any lay Catholic who offers it will do so at the risk of ecclesiastical censure. The fact that he incurs that risk will raise him in our estimation and make his co-operation the more welcome, but can only underline the contradiction between his faith and our philosophy.

3. Conclusion

In short, the Marxist attitude to religion follows from the Marxist analysis of society. In the words of the *Communist Manifesto*, "the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles". The last class struggle, that between the capitalists and the workers, has in the twentieth century reached a climax. The capitalists (as Marx and Engels foresaw in 1858) have headed off revolution in their homelands only by exploiting colonial peoples. This (as Lenin showed) has meant fighting colonial wars and, when necessary, world wars for the acquisition or retention of colonies. Up to a point this has been profitable to the bourgeoisie. It has paid them in colonial dividends and war profits, and has divided the working-class parties who might have menaced their rule. But now has come a point when world war means suicide. World peace on the other hand means the end of capitalism. There is no exit from the dilemma for the bourgeoisie. They are accordingly trying to stave off a decision by a device christened "cold war", which means perpetually preparing for a "hot war" which they know would destroy them, but dare not renounce, since war preparation alone keeps their economy going.

Whoever practises or publicly defends this dangerous and

deadly fraud is an enemy of the human race, without common honesty or common honour, and to be fought with no holds barred. It matters not whether he is religious or irreligious, except for one thing. If he is a professing Christian (as most cold warriors are) he must be a measureless hypocrite. Christians believe, or profess to believe, that God incarnate once walked the earth and taught his disciples: "Agree with thine adversary quickly. Resist not him that is evil. Love your enemies. Judge not, that ye be not judged." Professing Christians who stock-pile nuclear weapons, who brag of their ability to exterminate millions of the human race in nuclear war, and who smear advocates of disarmament as "starry-eyed idealists", "fellow-travellers" and "security risks" are obviously hypocrites of a species which neither the Old nor the New Testament contains language to characterise. As Dante wrote of another sort of political humbug, *Non ragionam di lor, ma guarda e passa*—"Let us not speak of them, but look and pass".¹

I come now to those believers who are ready to co-operate with us in demanding nuclear disarmament, total disarmament by agreed stages, and those economic changes which will be necessary to reconcile mass production with a world at peace—changes impossible without a planned economy or, in a word, Socialism. With such believers we shall not quarrel about their beliefs. As J. B. S. Haldane says: "It is quite possible to use events which are known to be mythical as a vehicle for real emotion . . . Religious people are quite justified in using language as a vehicle for group emotions with a view to subsequent action. In fact that was the original use of language."²

Our attitude, therefore, to religious people will depend on the kind of action which they use religious language to promote. If they use it to promote anti-Socialism and war, they are enemies. If they use it to promote Socialism and peace, they are friends, even though we prefer to use other

¹ Dante, *Inferno*, III.

² *Rationalist Annual*, 1943.

language. As long as the battle for peace and Socialism is on, we have no time to quarrel over words.

Other considerations arise when a Socialist State is actually in being. Certainly a Socialist State can tolerate no inquisition into private opinions.¹ That does not mean that a Socialist State can be expected to assist in the inculcation or propagation of religion. As Haldane says in the passage quoted, language is not only "a vehicle for group emotions", but also "a vehicle for statements of fact . . . If the words used in religious ceremonies are taken as statements of fact they will lead to false beliefs and wrong actions. Many of these words, but not all, will lead to the wrong kind of emotions as well, and hence have no justification whatever". This consideration is paramount when it is a question of instruction in State schools or talks in State radio programmes. To ask a Socialist State to give religious instruction in its schools or to broadcast religious talks on its radio is to ask it to educate its people, not in facts that will help them to play their part as citizens, but in beliefs incapable of verification and incompatible with the scientific outlook on which the life of modern society depends. For a Socialist State to *prohibit* religious teaching would be inquisitorial and undesirable; but to ask a Socialist State to *provide* or *assist* religious teaching is unreasonable. A Socialist State here and there may have to concede such assistance as part of a political compromise; but such concessions should be recognised as tactical, and not advocated where they are not necessary.

We come back in the end to the materialist basis of Marxism. Just as the working-class struggle against capitalism is the consequence and completion of the capitalist victory over feudalism, so Marxism, the theory of the class struggle, is the consequence and completion of the materialist philosophy expounded by the great bourgeois thinkers of the

¹ To represent the hard-hitting criticism of Boris Pasternak by other Soviet writers as an inquisition into his private opinions is a typical piece of bourgeois hypocrisy. Pasternak has suffered nothing except hard words—which proverbially break no bones.

eighteenth century. Those thinkers, voicing the protest of their class against feudal privilege, concentrated their main attack on the greatest feudal power of all, the Catholic Church. To divine revelation, interpreted by priests and enforced by kings, they opposed human interest—conceived after their bourgeois fashion as the interest of free and independent individuals entering into a contract for their mutual advantage. Marxists endorse the bourgeois opposition to priestcraft and kingcraft—indeed we are more faithful to it than the bourgeoisie have been. But Marxists point out that the human interest to which appeal is made is not the interest of free and independent individuals, but the interest of opposed classes struggling for the product of human labour. The capitalists have stepped into the shoes of the feudalists, and now use priests and kings as pieces of pageantry to bamboozle the masses. The militant workers, led by Marxists, now turn against the capitalists political and intellectual weapons taken from their own armoury.

It is unthinkable that Marxists should abandon the theory of dialectical materialism which has proved so serviceable a tool in the interpretation of the past and in the shaping of the present and future. But in applying it at particular times to particular countries account must be taken of historical and local conditions. Two considerations apply especially to Britain.

Firstly, industrial capitalism was firmly established in Britain, and the Labour Movement was already born, before any Socialist theory was formulated. Hence the British workers were influenced, and to a diminishing degree are still influenced, by religious sects which broke away from the Establishment in the Revolution of the seventeenth century or in the Methodist movement of the eighteenth. Socialism, therefore, from the time of Owen onward was bound to be handicapped, and in fact has been handicapped, by direct attacks on religion. Every Marxist must of course be ready, if challenged, to give an account of his philosophy. But in the absence of such a challenge the battle with religion is

best left to organisations whose primary purpose is to fight it.

Secondly, as Marx and Engels foresaw, the colonisation of backward countries has enabled the capitalist class in Britain and elsewhere to share its gains with a section of the workers and so to postpone social revolution. But this has been possible only at the price of many colonial wars, two world wars and the threat of a third. Capitalist crisis has not ended; but its nature has been transformed. The centralisation of capital has led to revolution and Socialism in one third of the world, but also to a deepening and widening international tension which threatens to bury capitalists and workers alike in a common ruin.

This threat offers Socialists a unique opportunity to mobilise the workers in all capitalist countries against a ruling class who have degenerated from mere thieves and cheats into homicidal and suicidal maniacs. It also offers a unique opportunity to win to Socialism sincere believers whose religion is not a mere social and political convenience. Do they believe in peace on earth? Do they believe that treasure should not be laid up for private greed, but that food, drink, clothing and the other good things of life should be provided by the labour of all for the use of all? Or do they believe in mouthing Gospel texts while the rulers whom they have elected stock-pile the means of mass murder and suicide? If these believers are sincere, let them join forces with Marxists for peace and Socialism. They may call it the kingdom of God on earth; Marxists call it the co-operative commonwealth. What matter names, if we mean the same concrete things?

In this way Marxists can stop the "revisionist" rot that set in before 1914 and has ever since tied Social Democracy to the chariot-wheels of capitalism and war, and can make the Labour Movement militant once again. In this way Marxists can help to put a Labour government in power, not on a programme of watered-down Toryism, but with a mandate to achieve the ends for which the Labour Movement exists—Socialism and peace.

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